

On solid ground?

Eleven facts about the EU-Turkey Agreement

1 December 2016

The EU-Turkey Statement, reached on 18 March 2016, has had a dramatic impact on refugee movements in the Eastern Mediterranean. It has sharply reduced irregular crossings from Turkey to Greece and with it the number of people who die during this dangerous journey.

It has achieved this without diverting refugees onto other, more dangerous routes and without breaking EU and international refugee law, which prohibits sending back people who request asylum without due process. There have been no mass expulsions; in fact, more people had been returned from Greece to Turkey in the three months preceding the agreement (irregular migrants readmitted under the bilateral Greece-Turkey readmission agreement) than have been sent back in the eight months since the EU-Turkey deal was concluded.

The situation in the Aegean stands in a sharp contrast to the situation in the Central Mediterranean, where numbers of crossings and deaths are very similar to those in 2015. The difference is that the EU has a credible plan for the Aegean, and no credible plan for the Central Mediterranean.

However, some key issues have to be addressed urgently to ensure the continued success of this agreement. Most importantly, the EU must work with Turkey to ensure that Turkey is a safe country offering protection to Syrians under Turkey's Temporary Protection Scheme for Syrians and a credible asylum process to other nationalities that could be sent back from the Greek islands. Greece needs to urgently increase the capacity of its Asylum Service and Appeals Committees to swiftly process the claims of currently more than 16,500 refugees and migrants on the islands; it also needs to improve the conditions on the islands. With the help of case workers from EU member states, this is doable. The EU must also fulfil its promises to Turkey under the EU-Turkey Agreement if it wants to see Turkey make an extra effort. This includes visa liberalisation and the resettlement of a significant number of Syrian refugees.

If this does not happen, the number of people on the islands will inexorably rise until a breaking point is reached and the agreement unravels.

If, on the other hand, the EU-Turkey agreement is implemented in full, it will ensure control in the Aegean in the coming year in line with existing EU legislation. This could demonstrate that it is possible to combine control of borders with respect for the UN Refugee Convention. It is a way to combine empathy and respect for refugee rights with control and security concerns.

Eleven basic facts about the EU-Turkey agreement

FACT ONE: The refugee crisis of 2015 was largely about the Aegean where 84 percent of all illegal border crossings into the EU took place.

Detections of illegal crossings of EU borders, 2015¹

Route	Border crossings
Eastern Mediterranean (sea and land)	885,386
Central Mediterranean	153,946
Other routes	10,035
TOTAL	1,049,367

FACT TWO: There has been a dramatic fall in the number of crossings in the Aegean since March 2016.

Arrivals on Greek islands in 2016²

Date	Monthly total
January	67,415
February	57,066
March	26,971
April	3,650
May	1,721
June	1,554
July	1,920
August	3,447
September	3,080
October	2,970
Nov. (until 29)	1,991

¹ Frontex, [Risk Analysis for 2016](#), March 2016, p 17.

² UNHCR, Refugees/Migrants Emergency Response - Mediterranean, [Greece](#).

FACT THREE: Since March the number of people drowning in the Aegean has also dropped as a result of fewer crossings.

Deaths in the Aegean until 28 November 2016³

<u>Month</u>	<u>Deaths</u>
January	275
February	46
March	45
April	10
May	0
June	0
July	7
August	3
September	27
October	2
November (until 28)	14

FACT FOUR: While the EU-Turkey agreement has reduced the number of crossings in the Aegean, EU policies have not managed to influence the numbers of refugees and migrants reaching Italy. Arrivals in the Central Mediterranean in 2016 are similar to those in 2015.

Detections of illegal border crossings by sea, April-Oct. 2015 and 2016⁴

	<u>Greece</u>	<u>Italy</u>
2015 (April to Oct.)	584,291	130,822
2016 (April to Oct.)	18,342	140,650

FACT FIVE: There has been no redirection of refugee/migrant flows from the Aegean to the Central Mediterranean. These are separate and independent flows as the nationalities of the refugees and migrants show.

Top nationalities of arrivals in Greece and Italy in 2016, as of end-November 2016⁵

<u>Greece</u>		<u>Italy</u>	
Syria	47%	Nigeria	21%
Afghanistan	25%	Eritrea	12%
Iraq	15%	Gambia	7%
Pakistan	5%	Ivory Coast	7%
Iran	3%	Sudan	7%
Other	5%	Guinea	6%
		Somalia	5%
		Senegal	5%
		Mali	5%
		Bangladesh	4%
		Other	22%

³ IOM/Missing Migrants Project, [Mediterranean](#).

⁴ UNHCR, Refugees/Migrants Emergency Response - Mediterranean, [Greece](#) and [Italy](#).

⁵ UNHCR, Refugees/Migrants Emergency Response - Mediterranean, [Greece](#) and [Italy](#).

FACT SIX: There have been no mass expulsions from Greece under the agreement – in fact, the number of irregular migrants that were readmitted from Greece to Turkey under their bilateral readmission agreement before the EU-Turkey Agreement (967 from January to March 2016⁶) was higher than the number of people readmitted since (731). This is the result of slow processing of asylum claims on the islands and a reluctance to send asylum seekers back to Turkey.

Transfers from Greece to Turkey until 28 November 2016⁷

Month	Transfers (by persons)
April	386
May	55
June	27
July	0
August	16
September	94
October	139
November	14
Total	731

FACT SEVEN: While relatively few refugees and migrants now undertake the dangerous and illegal journey to Greece, there are still new arrivals on an almost daily base, increasing the number of refugees and migrants on the Greek islands.

Arrivals on the Greek islands – daily average⁸

	Daily average
January	2,175
February	1,968
March	870
April	122
May	56
June	52
July	62
August	111
September	103
October	96
Nov. (until 29)	71

⁶ European Commission, [First Report on the progress made in the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement](#), 20 April 2016, p. 4.

⁷ European Commission, [Operational implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement](#), as of 28 November 2016.

⁸ UNHCR, Refugees/Migrants Emergency Response - Mediterranean, [Greece](#).

FACT EIGHT: Already now the number of refugees and migrants on the Greek islands is beyond existing capacities to host people decently.

Occupancy and capacity on Greek islands, 28 November 2016⁹

Island	People	Capacity
Lesvos	6,362	3,500
Chios	4,415	1,100
Samos	2,600	850
Kos	1,982	1,000
Leros	890	1,000
Rhodes	292	0
Megisti	13	0
Tilos	13	0
Total	16,567	7,450

FACT NINE: Initially the European Commission asked for 400 asylum case workers and 400 interpreters from EU member states to be deployed through EASO on the Greek islands in order to help Greek case workers process asylum claims under the EU-Turkey agreement. Currently, there are only 44 member state case workers and 64 interpreters on Greek islands, as well as 12 EASO staff and 17 interim staff seconded to the Greek Asylum Service.

EU support to the Greek Asylum Service

Island	Member states experts	Interpreters	EASO staff	Interim staff seconded
Lesbos	10	17	4	7
Chios	17	16	3	5
Samos	12	13	3	2
Leros	5	9	1	1
Kos	10	9	1	2
Total	44	64	12	17

⁹ UNHCR, [Greece daily map indicating capacity and occupancy \(governmental figures\)](#), as of 28 November 2016.

FACT TEN: The number of Syrian refugees that the EU has resettled from Turkey since the EU-Turkey Statement remains modest.

Resettlements of Syrians from Turkey to EU countries until 28 November 2016¹⁰

EU country	Syrians resettled from Turkey
Germany	936
France	411
Sweden	278
Netherlands	253
Finland	129
Belgium	98
Italy	75
Spain	57
Luxemburg	52
Lithuania	25
Portugal	12
Estonia	11
Latvia	6
Total	2,343

¹⁰ European Commission, [Operational implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement](#), as of 28 November 2016.

FACT ELEVEN: Despite repeated calls from the Commission, so far only 5,875 asylum seekers have been relocated from Greece. (A July 2015 decision on initially voluntary relocations foresaw 16,000 relocations from Greece; in September 2015 this number was increased to 66,400 and made mandatory.) Asylum seekers who have reached Greece after 24 March 2016 do not qualify for relocation; nor do nationalities with recent recognition rates lower than 75 percent.

Relocations from Greece until 28 November 2016¹¹

Country	Relocated from Greece	Relocated from Offers (total IT and GR)	Italy
France	2,091	231	3,720
Netherlands	725	331	1,225
Finland	542	322	1,270
Romania	460	43	1,502
Portugal	459	261	1,742
Spain	348	50	900
Germany	196	207	3,250
Belgium	177	29	530
Lithuania	173	0	500
Latvia	140	8	491
Ireland	109	0	434
Luxembourg	104	40	200
Slovenia	101	23	130
Estonia	66	0	157
Cyprus	42	10	140
Malta	34	46	131
Bulgaria	29	0	1,302
Czech Republic	12	0	50
Croatia	10	9	26
Slovakia	9	0	110
Sweden	0	39	300
Poland	0	0	100
Austria	0	0	0
Hungary	0	0	0
Denmark	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
UK	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Switzerland	28	133	690
Norway	20	20	585
Liechtenstein	0	0	43
Iceland	0	0	0
Total	5,875 (from 66,400)	1,802 (from 39,600)	19,528 (from 106,000)

¹¹ European Commission, [Member States' Support to the Emergency Relocation Mechanism](#), as of 28 November 2016.